

BURT ROAD BRIDGE

Burt Road, spanning the East Fork of
the West Branch of the St. Joseph
of Maumee River
Hillsdale vicinity
Hillsdale County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-50

HAER

MICH

30 - HILLS.V

1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

BURT ROAD BRIDGE

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Location: Burt Road, Spanning the East Fork of the West Branch of the St. Joseph of Maumee River, Hillsdale Vicinity, Hillsdale County, Michigan

UTM: 16.694806.4626522
Quad: Reading, Michigan

Date of Construction: 1897

Present Owner: Hillsdale County Road Commission

Present Use: Vehicular Traffic

Significance: The Burt Road Bridge is the only known surviving example of a Michigan bridge built by the Ohio Bridge Company of Toledo, Ohio. This firm was one of many short lived bridge companies that operated the Midwest in the late nineteenth century.

Project Information: This documentation was undertaken in April, 1991 in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement by the Michigan Department of Transportation as a mitigative measure prior to the replacement of the bridge.

Stanley L. Clingerman
Engineer
Hillsdale County Road Commission
Hillsdale, Michigan

Hillsdale County was first settled in 1827 by Moses Allen, from the Detroit area, who had helped survey the "Chicago Road" through the area in 1825. It was settled later than the surrounding areas because it was nearly inaccessible to settlers from the East, because of an almost impenetrable cottonwood swamp to the East of Tecumseh, Michigan.

In 1828, Beriah Jones, following the newly surveyed "Chicago Road", settled where it crossed the St. Joseph River, the site of the present village of Jonesville.

Jeremiah Arnold settled in what is now Hillsdale, in 1834. Others followed, the settlement grew, and in 1843, Hillsdale became the County seat due to its size and central location. By 1838, all 18 townships in the county had been settled.

By 1843, the railroad from the east had reached Hillsdale, and for years, until the railroad reached Chicago in 1852, Hillsdale was the terminus of the railroad and the main transfer route for goods going west. Railroad shops, warehouses, hotels and other related businesses sprung up, creating a booming prosperity for Hillsdale which lasted well into the late 1920's.

Today, Hillsdale has lost much of its earlier importance, but still remains the largest town in Hillsdale County.

The Burt Road Bridge was built by the Ohio Bridge Company, of Toledo, Ohio, in 1897. The significance of this structure is that it is the only known surviving example of the Michigan bridge built by this company. A request was made to Mr. Stanley Clingerman, the Engineer-Manager of the Hillsdale County Road Commission for any construction plans or other records of this structure. He reported that the Road Commission was not yet organized when the structure was built, and he could find no construction plans or any other documents, in the Road Commission records. He, however, speculated that since this bridge is on a local road, it is very likely that Woodbridge Township commissioned the bridge to be built. He then made a request to the Woodbridge Township Clerk, Mrs. Maxine Hinkle, to search for any construction plans or other records that the Township might have.

She reported that the Township has no records of plans or other documents for this bridge. She said that many old files were destroyed by a former Township Supervisor who thought that there was no point keeping these old records.

A final attempt to obtain records was made to the Hillsdale County Historical Society. The County Historian, Mr. Vernon Stevens, reported that he could not find any records, or had no information on this structure.

It is therefore apparent that no plans, or any other form of documentation exist for this bridge.

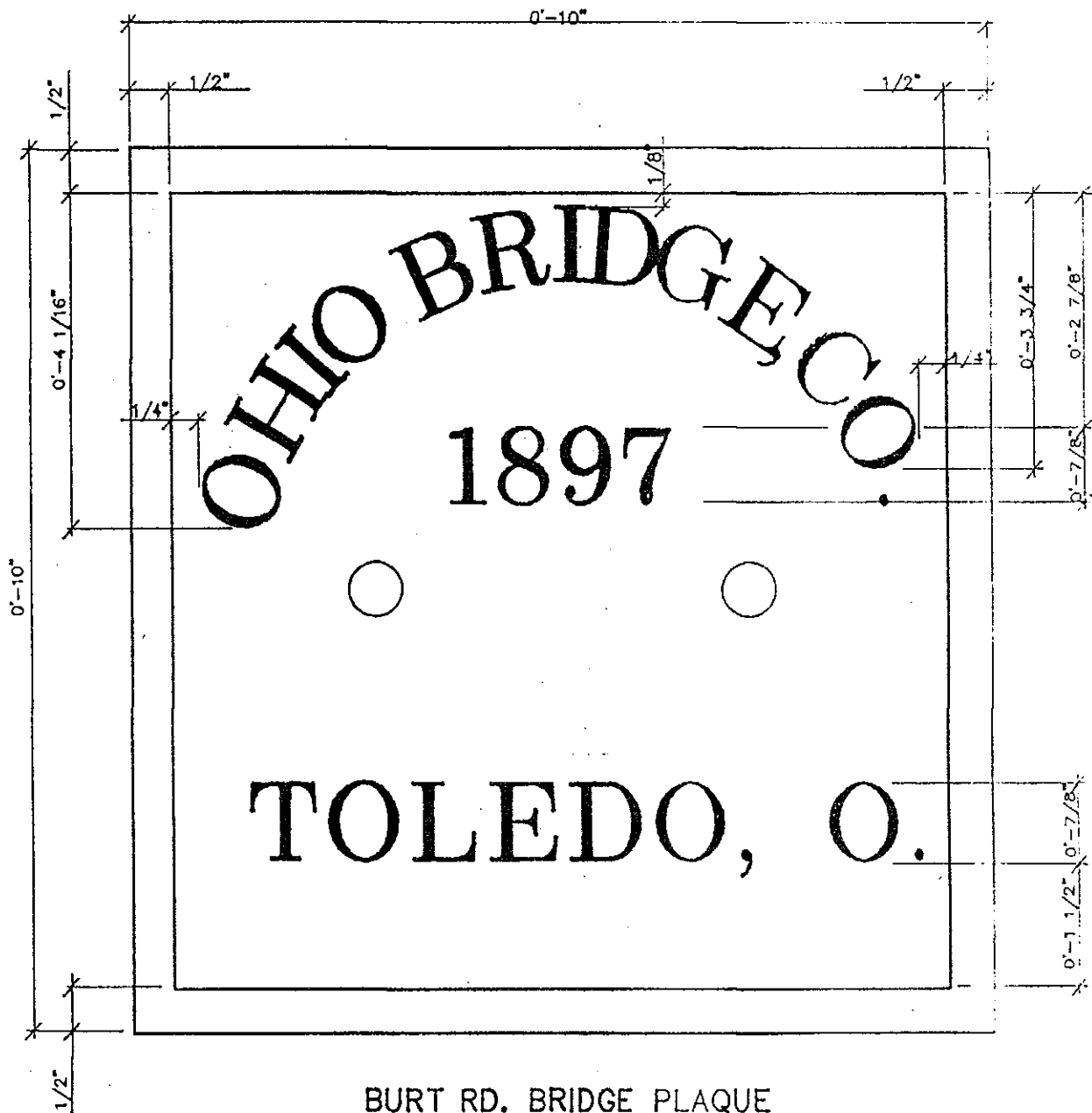
The only existing evidence of the bridge's age and builder is the plaque that was attached to the bridge which read "1897 - Ohio Bridge Company - Toledo, Ohio". This plaque was hanging by only one rivet, so it was removed from the structure and it is presently stored at the Hillsdale County Road Commission offices for safe keeping.

The Burt Road Bridge is a single span Steel pony truss structure with riveted connections. The bridge consists of a Pratt truss span 38'-0" in length 15'-0" in width, a 3 1/2" thick wooden plank deck supported on seven 8" steel I-beams with two 12" transverse steel floor beams spaced at 13'-2" centers. The bridge is founded on concrete abutments.

Burt Road is a rural collector road servicing agricultural interests in southwestern Hillsdale County. The Burt Road Bridge crosses the east fork of the West Branch of the St. Joseph River, 738 feet west of the intersection of Burt and Woodbridge Roads. The river is skewed to the left of the existing roadway at an angle of 10 degrees.

References

Hillsdale County Road Commission
Woodbridge Township
Hillsdale County Historical Society



BURT RD. BRIDGE PLAQUE